

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4714

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LUXEMBOURG 0857

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LU

SUBJ: WEHENKEL EASED OUT AS PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

1. LUXEMBOURG'S UNICAMERAL PARLIAMENT OPENED ITS 1975-76 SESSION OCTOBER 14 AND PROMPTLY MOVED TO REPLACE THE AGING PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, SOCIALIST DEPUTY AND ELDER STATESMAN ANTOINE WEHENKEL. AS A COMMUNIST DEPUTY INTONED THE TRADITIONAL MEDIEVAL ALLOCUTION OPENING THE NEW SESSION, THE ASSEMBLY ADOPTED WITHOUT DEBATE A MOTION -- CAREFULLY AGREED UPON IN ADVANCE -- TO REPLACE WEHENKEL BY SOCIALIST CHIEF WHIP RENE VAN DEN BULCKE. JACQUES POOS, EDITOR OF THE PARTY'S DAILY TAGEBLATT, WAS CHOSEN TO REPLACE VAN DEN BULCKE AS HEAD OF THE SOCIALIST PARLIAMENTARY GROUP.

2. WEHENKEL'S OUSTER HAD BEEN DECIDED ON BY A NARROW VOTE IN THE SOCIALIST PARLIAMENTARY GROUP THE PREVIOUS DAY, AND APPEARED TO HAVE LESS TO DO WITH HIS REPUTATION AS A PARTY MODERATE THAN WITH HIS ADVANCING AGE (HE WILL BE 69 IN FEBRUARY) AND WITH THE AMBITIONS OF VAN DEN BULCKE, 59, A HARD-DRIVING POLITICAL INFIGHTER. MR. WEHENKEL, IN FACT, HAD IMPLICITLY PROMISED TO STEP DOWN IN FAVOR OF A YOUNGER PARTY LEADER AFTER HIS TRIP TO THE U.S. IN SEPTEMBER ACCOMPANYING PRIME MINISTER THORN TO THE OPENING OF THE UNGA SESSION IN NEW YORK. UPON HIS

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RETURN WEHENKEL APPARENTLY CHANGED HIS MIND ABOUT

BOWING OUT QUIETLY AND ATTEMPTED TO RETAIN THE ASSEMBLY PRESIDENCY. ALTHOUGH WEHENKEL WAS OUSTED AS PRESIDENT, HE WILL RETAIN HIS SEAT AS A DEPUTY UNTIL HIS MANDATE EXPIRES IN FEBRUARY, WHEN HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY RETIRE FROM ACTIVE POLITICS.

3. VAN DEN BULCKE, WHOSE POLITICAL CAREER BEGAN IN 1963 WHEN HE WAS ELECTED TO THE LUXEMBOURG CITY COUNCIL, IS SOMETHING OF AN UNKNOWN QUALITY TO MANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES AS HE HAS NEVER BECOME CLEARLY IDENTIFIED WITH ANY POLITICAL FACTION OR LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES. MOST OBSERVERS STRESS HIS PERSONAL AMBITION; HOWEVER, IN HIS FIRST OFFICIAL MOVES HE STRUCK A CONCILIATORY, REUNIFYING TONE AND REPORTEDLY PRESSED HIS SOCIALIST COLLEAGUES IN CAUCUS TO CONTINUE BRINGING IN YOUNGER DEPUTIES AND ACTIVISTS AT THE EXPENSE OF OLDER, MORE ESTABLISHED PARTY FIGURES.
PHILLIPS

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